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ABSTRACT

A study to compare the mentorship experiences of female and male faculty members in a large research institute of higher education is described. Three hypotheses were defined: (1) mentors are not available to women and men on an equal basis during key points in career development; (2) if the sex of the mentor and person receiving guidance differs, the form of guidance will differ; and (3) people who have had mentors are more likely to serve as mentors for others than those who have not had this experience. Equal numbers of female and male respondents (N=218) responded to a questionnaire concerning presence of mentor, sex of mentor and recipient, moral support provided, degree of sponsorship, professional connections, and career point of mentor guidance. Although over 3/4 of the men and women involved in the study reported having had a mentor themselves, there was a statistically significant difference between their perception about the general availability of mentors. More women than men believed that mentors were not generally available to members of their sex. The study did not indicate that it was particularly important to have a mentor of the same sex. It did indicate that a higher proportion of faculty members who had received guidance and sponsorship by a mentor served as mentors for others. A series of tables show data for each questionnaire item. (LP)

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WHAT ABOUT MENTORS AND WOMEN IN ACADEME?

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WHAT ABOUT MENTORS AND WOMEN IN ACADEME?

INTRODUCTION

At the time of the Civil War, women who attended college were pioneers, and there was heated debate among educators whether or not women should be allowed to acquire a college education. Education of men, whether for trades or professions, included periods of apprenticeship in which training was acquired in a study and work arrangement with persons established in the field. These arrangements provided opportunities not only for the acquisition of skills but also for introduction to others in similar trades and professions.

While women gradually gained increasing access to higher education during the early years of the twentieth century and were able to study in many subject areas, the opportunities to work under apprentice or sponsor arrangements with persons established in various fields were very limited. Thus, the access to credentials established through education increased while the access to credentials established through practice did not.

In the 1960's, an emerging social consciousness prompted women to take a look at their low representation in such professions as higher education, medicine, law, business, and dentistry. With the enactment, during the late 1960's and early 1970's, of important federal legislation requiring nondiscrimination in access to education and employment, new doors have been opened for women interested in these professions. Today, women are educating themselves for professional roles and are seeking entrance into those positions and appointments which provide apprenticeship training for professional, managerial, and administrative positions.

The purpose of this study is to compare the mentorship experiences of women and men who are faculty members in a large research institution of higher education, by looking at both the guidance and sponsorship received during career development and the guidance and sponsorship offered to others. The processes of mentoring and role modeling have taken on a new significance as desirable and necessary to the development of women in the academic setting. While merit is very important in terms of academic credentials, it has been documented that social factors play a role in selection for initiation into the essential apprenticeship training for professions. Beyond setting higher goals - the first step - women have begun to seek mentors within their discipline who will take a personal interest in their careers. These mentors may assume a number of roles: counselor and provider of moral support; teacher of new skills; sponsor of a protege's appointment and promotion; friend willing to share academic experiences, values, and resources.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To guide a study about the role of mentors during the careers of faculty members at a major research institution of higher education, the following hypotheses were defined:

1. Mentors are not available to women and men on an equal basis during key points in development of a career in academia.

2. If the sex of the mentor and person receiving guidance and sponsorship differ, the form of the guidance and sponsorship will differ.

3. Women and men who have had mentors are more likely to serve as mentors for others than those who have not experienced this guidance and sponsorship.

Independent variables were defined as the presence or absence of a mentor, the sex of the mentor, and the sex of those having mentors available. Dependent variables were moral support and guidance; sponsorship toward postdoctoral appointments, fellowships, research awards; professional sharing of experiences, resources, academic values; opportunities to collaborate with senior faculty; introduction to professional networks in professional organizations; opportunities for visibility on campus via committees, special assignments; and support for promotion.

THE STUDY

Questionnaires were mailed to all 268 women in full-time, tenure-track appointments (both those not yet tenured and those who had tenure) at The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa. Questionnaires were also mailed to a sample of 268 men in full-time, tenure-track appointments on the same campus. To obtain the sample of men, a computerized listing of every third male tenure-track faculty member was obtained, numbering 449. This listing was narrowed by deleting departments which had no women faculty and by matching the remaining men to the sample of women on the basis of rank. Of 240 questionnaires returned, all of the 109 questionnaires from men and the first 109 questionnaires returned by women were analyzed by computer for this study, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Descriptive data on the sample are presented in Tables I and II.

TABLE I

RANK OF RESPONDENTS

	Women	Men
Rank	#	#
Asst. Professor	54	36
Assoc. Professor	43	37
Professor	11	36
Not Stated	1	

TABLE II

FIELDS OF RESPONDENTS

Field	Women	Men
Physical Sciences	3	8
Life Sciences	5	15
Social Sciences	12	17
Humanities	23	16
Business, Journalism, Law, Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy	24	32
Speech Pathology, Home Economics, Social Work, Library Science, Physical Ed.	19	10
Nursing, Physical Therapy, Dental Hygiene	18	1
Education	5	10

RESULTS

One hundred and seventy-seven (81%) of the faculty members reported having mentors who expressed a personal interest in their careers and provided guidance and sponsorship at key points. The proportions of women and men, overall, who had mentors were approximately the same (women 79%, men 85%).

TABLE III

RESPONDENTS WHO HAD MENTORS

Field	# Women Who* Had Mentors	# Men Who+ Had Mentors
Physical Sciences	1 (33%)	6 (75%)
Life Sciences	5 (100%)	14 (93%)
Social Sciences	9 (75%)	13 (77%)
Humanities	19 (83%)	16 (100%)
Business, Journalism, Law, Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy	18 (75%)	25 (78%)
Speech Pathology, Home Economics Social Work, Library Science, Physical Education	14 (74%)	7 (70%)
Nursing, Physical Therapy, Dental Hygiene	15 (83%)	1 (100%)
Education	5 (100%)	9 (90%)

* $\frac{\text{women who had mentors}}{\text{all women, that field}}$ + $\frac{\text{men who had mentors}}{\text{all men, that field}}$

As outlined in Table III, the proportions of women and men who had mentors, delineated by fields, were similar except for Physical Science. Although the numbers were small, two out of three women reported they did not have a mentor. Most of the mentors were professors (all ranks), department chairpersons, or deans (women's mentors 70%, men's mentors 72%). Other positions held by mentors were those of academic advisors (graduate and undergraduate), administrators, or professional colleagues.

The first hypothesis was: Mentors are not available to women and men on an equal basis during key points in development of a career in academia. Fewer women (39%) than men (54%) agreed with the first part of the statement, "Mentors are not available to women and men on an equal basis," while more women (43%) than men (24%) disagreed. This difference was statistically significant ($p<.001$) and suggests that women and men differ in their perception of the availability of mentors.

The data were further analyzed to explore other aspects of mentorship. Table IV summarizes information provided by these faculty members about the gender of their mentors. These data indicate that most mentors for both women and men have been men.

TABLE IV

GENDER OF MENTORS

	Women		Men		Both Sexes	
Women	25	(29%)	57	(67%)	3	(4%)
Men	6	(7%)	82	(90%)	3	(3%)

Table V illustrates the point in these faculty members' careers at which guidance and sponsorship were received from a mentor. Mentors most often function for both women and men during their graduate study and least often function for both women and men by the time they are full professors. More men than women reported receiving career guidance and sponsorship as undergraduates, ($p=.05$) and more women than men reported receiving career guidance and sponsorship as assistant professors ($p<.001$). These data support the first hypothesis.

TABLE V

CAREER POINT OF MENTOR'S GUIDANCE

Faculty	Career Point, Mentor's Guidance					
	UG	Grad	Post-Doc	Asst. Prof.	Assoc. Prof.	Prof.
Women	10 (12%)	61 (72%)	13 (15%)	36 (66%)	10 (12%)	2 (2%)
Men	19 (21%)	66 (73%)	20 (22%)	34 (37%)	10 (11%)	4 (4%)

The specific career assistance received from mentors is summarized in Table VI. A similar proportion of women and men had mentors who shared professional experiences, resources, and academic values. More men than women received moral support and guidance; sponsorship toward postdoctoral appointments, fellowships, or research awards ($p=.01$); opportunities to collaborate; and introduction to professional networks. More women than men reported opportunities for campus visibility on committees or through special assignments ($p=.03$) and support for promotion.

TABLE VI

TYPE OF CAREER ASSISTANCE

Faculty	Specific Career Assistance by Mentor *						
	Guid-ance	Spon-sorship	Shared resources	Collab-oration	Net-works	Visi-bility	Promo-tion
Women	54(62%)	32(37%)	72(83%)	32(37%)	45(52%)	26(30%)	30(35%)
Men	64(70%)	49(54%)	75(82%)	38(42%)	55(60%)	16(18%)	22(24%)

*Guidance = Moral support and guidance.

Sponsorship = Sponsorship toward postdoctoral appointments, fellowships, research awards.

Shared Resources = Professional sharing of experiences, resources, academic values.

Collaboration = Opportunities to collaborate with senior faculty.

Networks = Introduction to professional networks in professional organizations.

Visibility = Opportunities for visibility on campus via committees, special assignments.

Promotion = Support for promotion.

The second hypothesis stated: If the sex of the mentor and person receiving guidance and sponsorship differ, the form of the guidance and sponsorship will differ. To test the second hypothesis, the forms of guidance and sponsorship received were compared for same sex pairs (female mentor, female faculty respondent; male mentor, male faculty respondent) and for opposite sex pairs (female mentor, male faculty respondent; male mentor, female faculty respondent). Table VII presents these data.

TABLE VII

COMPARISON OF SAME SEX AND OPPOSITE SEX PAIRS

Faculty	Specific Career Assistance by Mentors						
	Guidance	Sponsorship	Shared resources	Collaboration	Networks	Visibility	Promotion
Same Sex Pairs(N=107)	73(68%)	49(46%)	90(84%)	41(38%)	66(62%)	23(22%)	26(24%)
Opposite Sex Pairs(N=63)	38(60%)	28(44%)	49(77%)	26(41%)	31(49%)	16(25%)	23(37%)

More moral support and guidance, shared resources, and introduction to professional networks were reported for same sex pairs. Similar proportions were reported of sponsorship toward postdoctoral opportunities, collaboration with senior faculty, and assignments providing campus visibility by same sex pairs and opposite sex pairs. For opposite sex pairs, more support for promotions was reported. Thus, on four measures of career assistance, the data support the second hypothesis while on three measures of career assistance, the data do not support the hypothesis.

The third hypothesis was: Women and men who have had mentors are more likely to serve as mentors for others than those who have not experienced this guidance and sponsorship. As stated earlier, in this sample of women and men faculty members, 81% of the 218 respondents had received guidance and sponsorship at key points in their career development. Table VIII presents follow-up data about those who have in turn served as mentors for others.

TABLE VIII

Respondents	# Had Mentors	Served as Mentors for Others
N = 215*	177	118 (67%)
	# No Mentors	Served as Mentors for Others
	38	17 (45%)

*Three did not respond to this questionnaire item.

While the differences were not statistically significant at the p=.05 level, the data suggest that a higher proportion of faculty members who had received guidance and sponsorship by a mentor served as mentors for others than the proportion of faculty members who had not had a mentor during their career development. (It should be noted that a much higher number of respondents reported having mentors than not having mentors.)

SUMMARY

Over three-fourths of the women and men in this study of tenure-track faculty at a major research institution of higher education reported having a mentor. Many have received personalized guidance while preparing for an academic career. However, the data indicate there was a statistically significant difference between the perception of the women and men in this study about the availability of mentors. It was the women's experience, as reported, which seemed to reflect less availability of mentors for them. On the other hand, while women may perceive mentors to be less available to them, men do serve as mentors for women during the various periods of career development. The study did not indicate that it was particularly important to have a mentor of the same sex.

The two career points at which a mentor's personal interest, guidance, and sponsorship appear to be most often available are during graduate study and at the entry level rank of assistant professor. Both women and men appear to have equal access to mentors during graduate study, and more women than men report having mentors as assistant professors. However, women are less likely to have opportunities to collaborate with senior faculty on research and publications. The data suggest men are more likely than women to receive career guidance and sponsorship as undergraduates as well as during the postdoctoral phase in which fellowships and research awards provide apprenticeship experience.

A number of respondents noted benefits they had received in the process of serving as a mentor for others. Among benefits listed were the personal satisfaction of seeing people develop and succeed; the excitement of discussing research ideas, exploring mutual interests, and exchanging ideas; learning from students; receiving assistance with research; professional recognition; and practice in diplomacy.

While the apprenticeship model is not new, participation by women in mentorship during the development of an academic career has really just begun. The data from this study offer clues about the potential value of having a mentor during the years of developing an academic career and suggest that mentors receive valuable feedback and recognition through expressing personal interest in another's career and providing sponsorship and guidance.

Women who are aware of the usefulness of having apprenticeship training for academic positions should be assertive in seeking a mentor, whether a woman or a man, in their chosen area of interest as early as the undergraduate level. This should be a person who 'knows the ropes', who has achieved a measure of recognition and success, and who is available. Women should be especially assertive in seeking sponsorship toward postdoctoral appointments, fellowships, and research awards, opportunities to collaborate with senior faculty, and introductions to professional networks - types of career assistance that men have received more often than women from their mentors.